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# PATRICIA RICE



# LORD & Rogue

# LORD ROGUE - SAMPLE

ROGUES & DESPERADOES SERIES, BOOK 1



PATRICIA RICE



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Lord Rogue - Sample

**Patricia Rice**

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## AUTHOR'S NOTE

Except for the intrepid Roosevelts, the characters of this book are entirely fictional, although I have included the names of several of the inhabitants of early St. Louis for the sake of historical detail. We know these people existed, but detailed biographies of their characters are unavailable. I have used a writer's privilege of imagining them.

The story of the steamboat *New Orleans* and the New Madrid earthquakes comes entirely from tales of that time, including eyewitness reports and the log of the *New Orleans*. While the steamboat did not record picking up any extraneous passengers after the quakes (as a matter of fact, it avoided doing so, much to Lydia Roosevelts dismay), I have again used creative license to bring reality into touch with fiction. I have also compressed time and distance to get the boat to my hero and heroine in time, but the journey over that particular stretch of river did occur between December 16 and January 2, and the rest of the events are all too real. The marvelous Roosevelt's sailed through the Louisville shoals, the New Madrid quakes, Lydia's pregnancy, fire, Shawnees, and all the other tribulations of travel at that time to prove the viability of steamboat travel. The trip even included the marriage of two of their passengers, but that's a story for another time.

## SAMPLE



RED-BRONZE SKIN glistening in the September sun, Lonetree worked at a slender piece of cherry wood. Hunkered down on his heels, his back propped against the cabin wall, the keelboatman lifted the carved figure, admiring the feel of the wood as much as the product of his craftsmanship.

Above a nose naturally bent like a hawk's beak, dark eyes gleamed with satisfaction. Shoulder-length black hair and a gold ring in one ear masked razor-sharp cheekbones and any of nature's attempts at handsomeness.

The keelboatman whistled appreciatively, as if the woman appearing beneath his talented fingers were real. Gowned in long skirts lifted at the hem, the carving portrayed a regal lady, from the toes of her slipper-shod feet to the feathers of her broad-brimmed hat. The whittler chuckled at his own conceit and turned the piece in his hands, searching for flaws.

If only a real woman could be produced as easily as a wooden one, he would be a happy man. But finding a lady like this in the frontier wilderness of Ohio had as much likelihood as this piece of wood coming to life. He had deliberately left that life behind.

Lonetree set aside his toy and reached for his discarded shirt. The whores down at the tavern wouldn't object if he arrived clad only in deerskin breeches, but he had no intention of courting whores. If he were to settle down, he wanted a lady. As the good women of Cincinnati had made clear that they held no interest in a half-breed keelboatman, he would be moving on. Tonight—well, tonight the whores offered possibilities.

At the sound of an approaching boat, he propped himself in his earlier position and awaited the new arrival with interest.

Angry voices carried over the slap-slap of current against wooden keel as the other boat maneuvered into shore. Playing his role, Lonetree remained motionless, seemingly intent on his occupation. The distinctly feminine accents of one of the disputants caused him to look up from his carving in time to catch the glimpse of a

slender ankle and a long stockinged limb swinging over the boat's keel to the shore. Heavy black skirts quickly obscured the alluring sight, but his attention was captivated.

Savoring every detail, his gaze traveled from slippered toe, past the thick skirts of a mourning gown, to the hint of slender hips and a long, elegantly curved waist. He hesitated, afraid this dream would dissipate should he look higher, but bravely, he continued his survey.

He swallowed hard as his gaze encountered the full curve of a generous bosom disguised beneath that revolting black gown. Taking in the whole—he was looking upon the carved image in his hands come to life.

True, she wore a practical bonnet instead of the feathered creation of his imagination, but long curls revealed a mass of thick hair that glowed like polished mahogany. And her features—by the grace of the Great Spirit!—were finely carved and proud as any queen's. The desire to see her eyes had him on his feet before he realized it.

“But you said you could take me to St. Louis! What am I to do in this godforsaken spot? How am I to find another boat? Where am I to stay?” Anger fought with tears as the woman confronted the sneering boatman leaning on his long pole.

“You can go this side of Hades for all I care, Miss Uppity. The river's too damned low to travel without promise of more reward than you're ready to give. I'll take my chances on the whores and a cargo of lead before I'll take the likes of you any farther.”

“If I had been a gentleman with a purse full of gold, you would have taken me where I want, I warrant! Why must a woman who travels alone submit to this treatment? My gold is as good as any man's!”

Lonetree smothered a grin at this taunt. Tucking the back of his shirt into his pants, he sauntered closer, eyeing the crew of the other boat. They appeared to be enjoying the argument. Did the fool woman really think she could travel alone all the way to St. Louis with a boatload of women-starved men? Especially men of this ilk, accustomed to doing as they pleased, when they pleased. He wondered how many knifings the captain had had to put down before they reached this point.

“All the gold in hell won't pay me to risk my neck to take you to St. Louis. I don't relish finding a knife in my back hauling this rig over the falls while you dabble your toes in the water. Go find a man to protect you so I can do my duty.”

“Protect me! I can protect myself, as you well know! Give me my bags. I'll get to St. Louis without you.” Anger had obviously won out over tears as she stamped her elegant foot and set her hands on her hips, glaring at the boatman.

Lonetree came up behind her, eyeing the keelboatman's reaction to this

demand. Knowing the reputation of these men for mischief, he could imagine the possibilities a lady's trunk of fripperies would provide. It seemed an appropriate time to intervene.

"Give me the trunk, boys." He spoke with the deep, calm voice of authority learned in his youth.

The woman whirled and gasped at his physical nearness. He let his black eyes glitter beneath his faded red bandanna. His half-fastened blouse wouldn't conceal his torso, where the scars of battle labeled him as pirate or worse. She stepped back as he rolled his fingers into fists.

The keelboat captain eyed him without trepidation, however, giving him a nod of acquaintance. "Aye, Lonetree, she's all yours." Turning his head to his grinning crew, he barked orders: "Haul out the lady's trunks, boys. Be gentle about it. Lonetree's taking up the assignment."

Hoots and catcalls followed, but the trunks were delivered in order, stacked upon the rocky shore beneath the lady's glare.

Silently, Lonetree heaved the heavy trunks aboard a mule-drawn wagon near the river's edge. Without so much as a glance to the black-clad lady, he untethered the mule and hitched it to the traces. When everything was prepared, he waited beside the wagon in all his dissolute glory.

He watched her grip her reticule with gloved fingers, raise her chin, and approach the dilapidated wagon as if it were the comfortable carriage to which she was no doubt accustomed. Tear-drop blue eyes behind a thick fringe of black lashes displayed no trace of emotion as she accepted his assist into the wooden seat. A faint whiff of perfume drifted from the voluminous folds of her skirts as she settled them about the lovely ankles she kept concealed from view. He might as well not exist for all she noticed him.



THE JOURNEY from Philadelphia had been long and hard, but she had grown immune to the shocking inconveniences. If she must ride beside a savage into this timbered fortification that presumed to be called a town, she would do it with dignity.

Alicia Stanford held herself as distant from the stranger as the wagon seat would allow. She had expected him to stink, but other than a faintly masculine aroma she could not quite define, he seemed surprisingly clean. Even the odious shoulder-length hair appeared as fresh as her own, a definite asset after the vermin-laden heads of the boatmen. Shuddering, she stared out over the streets they passed.

Where was he taking her?

Shanty-built log houses gave way to an occasional brick edifice, but this



burgeoning frontier town on the Ohio held nothing for her. For the thousandth time, Alicia wondered if what she went toward was not worse than what she had left behind. Shame and humiliation kept her from turning back, and pure obstinacy erased self-pity. She would reach St. Louis if she had to die in the process.

The silent Indian halted the wagon outside one of the town's larger structures, but the tavern sign swinging overhead did not increase her hopes. With trepidation she took his callused hand and leapt from the wagon, studying the wooden walls while her driver retrieved the trunks. Hotels apparently did not exist this side of the mountains. But a tavern?

Without a word of explanation, the savage called Lonetree shouldered open the tavern door, and heaved the first of the trunks upon the polished plank floor inside. Then politely holding the door, he waited for her to enter.

Before she could set foot inside, a screech of outrage carried through the opening. "Don't you set your filthy foot inside my portals, you heathen! Begone with you a'fore I take a hatchet to your head!"

Startled, Alicia glanced up to the stoic man who had so politely come to her rescue. To her surprise, one twinkling black eye closed in an outrageous wink before he turned and staggered inside.

"Brought paying guest, Red-Haired Dog. Give me two bits." The self-assured giant who had been so graceful earlier now staggered across the uncarpeted floor like a herd of buffaloes, crashing into a wooden hat rack and knocking over a brass spittoon before collapsing against a brilliantly polished mahogany bar.

The red-haired, elfin man behind the counter turned purple with outrage, and reached for the afore-mentioned hatchet on the wall, until his glance caught Alicia standing, horrified, in the entrance.

"Oh, my word, my apologies, madam." He hastily dried his hands upon a linen towel and sent the long-haired Indian a scathing glance. "Carry in the lady's bags, heathen. Then you'll get your money."

Alicia could swear there was a self-satisfied smirk upon the Indian's face as he turned his back on the bar and staggered out the door, but she did not dare look him in the eyes again. Too tired to examine the intent of this absurd charade, she addressed the innkeeper.

"I seem to be stranded in this city for a few days, sir. Would you have a decent room that might accommodate me until I can find further transportation?" This haughty tone had served her well upon many an occasion, and it did not fail her now. The subservient bartender bowed and produced a ledger.

"I have a fine front room vacant that you should find entirely to your satisfaction." He produced a quill pen and scowled again as the Indian entered

carrying the last of the bags. "Be careful where you put them, you lazy lout. You'll mar the floor!"

Beginning to understand something of the innkeeper's nature, Alicia rummaged in her purse for a dollar piece. The Indian had neatly stacked her bags at her feet and stood staring down at her, a singularly odd expression in his eyes. He was younger than she had first imagined when he had spoken with such authority, and despite the flagrant insult of his unkempt hair and gold earring, he had a striking visage. She could not complain of his deliberate antagonizing of the horrible little man. Under other circumstances she would have found it amusing.

With as much graciousness as she could muster, she offered the coin. "Thank you very much for your assistance, sir. I hope you will accept a token of my appreciation."

The dark face broke into a white-toothed grin as he palmed the coin and made a rude gesture to the clerk. With another audacious wink he walked out.

"That was a mistake, miss, if you don't mind my saying so. He'll just drink it up. All Indians are like that. Worthless drunks, the lot of them. You took a terrible chance in traveling with that one. Mean, he is. Just as soon scalp you as look at you."

Since she had the spine-chilling feeling that the Indian had enjoyed looking at her, Alicia hastily turned back to the business at hand.

Signing the guest book, she inquired, "Could you recommend any guides familiar with the western part of the river? Or a boat that might be leaving downriver soon? I am trying to reach my father in St. Louis as soon as is practicable."

The little man snorted and swung the book around to read her name. "Well, Miss—or is it Mrs?" he glanced at her heavy mourning.

"Miss," she responded automatically, then regretted it instantly. "Mrs." she corrected. "We were married only a short while."

The innkeeper took a bent pair of wire-rimmed glasses from his pocket, and polished them before putting them on. "Well, Mrs. Stanford, were it me, I'd not step a foot farther into the interior. The Indians are on the warpath downriver, and the only settlements beyond here are stinking holes of filth and low-life riffraff. And St. Louis is overrun with those heathen Frenchies and Spaniards. You'd do well to stay right here, Mrs. Stanford. Cincinnati will be as grand as its name one of these days. Biggest little town on both rivers."

"I'd rather assume New Orleans claimed that title," Alicia commented dryly. "But I shall consider your advice. Thank you."

As she climbed the stairs to her new room, she considered the prospect for all of

one minute and discarded it promptly. She had not suffered the agonies of travel to come this far and give up. She had no purpose in staying here. She had no purpose at all anymore. The only goal that kept her chin up and her mind from the brink of despair was the possibility of finding out what had happened to her father. Even Indians on the warpath presented no obstacle for one in her state of mind.

**We hope you have enjoyed this sample of  
Lord Rogue  
by Patricia Rice  
Buy Lord Rogue at Book View Café**

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

With several million books in print and New York Times and USA Today's bestseller lists under her belt, former CPA Patricia Rice is one of romance's hottest authors. Her emotionally-charged contemporary and historical romances have won numerous awards, including the RT Book Reviews Reviewers Choice and Career Achievement Awards. Her books have been honored as Romance Writers of America RITA® finalists in the historical, regency and contemporary categories.

A firm believer in happily-ever-after, Patricia Rice is married to her high school sweetheart and has two children. A native of Kentucky and New York, a past resident of North Carolina and Missouri, she currently resides in Southern California, and now does accounting only for herself. She is a member of Romance Writers of America, the Authors Guild, and Novelists, Inc.

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